Got my guns and camera gear out of hock. I was even drunk enough to think about paying you that $110. But I figure I'll save that for when I get the final money lump. Unless you need it – and say so whenever you do.

Anyway, Ballantine thinks this is going to go. My guarantee is just for the paperback; hardcover, movie and TV rights are yet to be negotiated. I think you should get hustling at once on the TV rights....

Sincerely, Hunter

Thompson writes William J. Kennedy about life in San Francisco.

Aug. 10, 1965
San Francisco
Dear Willie:

... In all, my life has gone into a very strange groove. The other night I was arrested with Allen Ginsberg, as we left Ken Kesey's party for the Hell's Angels. My rent is paid two months in advance, which is perhaps the most unusual thing I can say at this time. And my home is full, night and day, of heinous thugs. On Friday one of them is bringing over some cubes of LSD and we are going to lock ourselves in. Sandy is terrified of it all, and [Thompson's son] Juan cries at the sight of these monsters, but the phone keeps ringing and people keep talking about money. I hope to be finished for good with this thing by Christmas, then go to either Brazil, Mexico or Chile. By then I should be able to get an advance on either The Rum Diary or some other novel, so I'm feeling pretty tough on that score.

Precipitously, HST

Upon publication in 1966, Thompson's "Hell's Angels" was proclaimed by many to be a journalistic masterpiece. Below, a young fan writes.

June 25, 1967
Dear Mr. Thompson,

I just got done reading your book on the Hell's Angels, and it's really great. That book is really great, I don't know what to say it's so great.

I'll tell you the Honest to God truth, I never read a book and finished it in full and this goes for school books, too. As for this book I didn't miss a word in it. You know when I get my driver's license in two years I'm buying me a big Harley and going to Cal. Believe what I say....

Sincerely yours, Dale
P.S. Man I think you're really great.

Thompson responds promptly to the 14-year-old.

July 6, 1967
Woody Creek, Colo.
Dear Dale....

When I was 14 I was a wild, half-wit punk who caused a lot of trouble and wanted to tear the world in half if for no other reason than it didn't seem to fit me too well. Now, looking back on it, I don't think I'd change much of what I did in those days ... but I've also learned at least one crucially important thing since then. And that's the idea of making your own pattern, not falling into grooves that other people made. Remember that if you can do one thing better than anybody it'll make life a hell of a lot easier for you in this world – which is a pretty mean world, when you get to know it, and a lot of people in it can ride big Harleys ... especially in California. The best of the Angels – the guys you might want to sit down and talk to – have almost all played that game for a while and then quit for something better. The ones who are left are almost all the kind who can't do anything else, and they're not much fun to talk to. They're not smart, or funny, or brave, or even original. They're just Old Punks.... And I don't see any sense in you wanting to go out to California and get in on a game that's a dead end. If you're bright enough to write me a good letter at your age, you're also bright enough to avoid putting yourself down the tube....

OK for all that noise, I just don't want you blaming me, 10 years from now, for giving you a bad lead. All I'm really saying is, right, be an outlaw ... but do it your own way, for your own reasons, and for christ's sake don't blow it as badly as the Angels have.

Sincerely, Hunter S. Thompson

Now established in Woody Creek, Colo., and something of a local celebrity, Thompson writes Tom Wolfe, reflecting on the disparity between critical success and commercial success.

Nov. 28, 1967
Woody Creek, Colo.
Dear Tom....

It's 5:10 on a very cold and snowy Sunday morning here, and I have to be up by noon to watch the Bears rap the Packers (remember, you read it here first) and then a nightmare struggle between the Colts and 49ers. I've been supporting myself recently by whipping locals around on the weekly point spreads. Nobody will bet with me tomorrow, and these are two fat-city games I've been waiting for. People spook easily in these mountains....

I wish to hell you were right about my being a "rich devil," but the truth of the matter is that I'm down to $200 or so and *Ramparts* sent my last check to Austin, Texas. God only knows why. I'm now trying to pry it out of the postmaster down there, but I figure he has instructions to burn anything in a *Ramparts* envelope. I agreed to write a "column" for them, but I have no idea how to start.... I just hung an antelope's head over my fireplace. Things are happening. And I have credit, so I've given up worrying about cash except that I have to settle this contract thing somehow.

Hunter

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DYLAN

[*Cont. from 58*] up. He has said he was somewhat of a loner and an academic disaster, ran a dismal D average for three years in one high school before they booted him, was so shy he'd take an F rather than get up in front of 20 kids and give an oral report. At birthday parties and in Little League – especially when Dad was in the stands – Jakob and his siblings were always conscious of being stared at, and he hated it. "Obviously," he says, knowing where this is going, "if you get onstage, there's a piece of you that says, 'I like being looked at.' I haven't found the connection in myself yet."

Jakob says that when he was growing up, the unspoken mantra was "*Blend!*" The drills were in place before he was born. "If I was in a public place with my dad, and people noticed," he says, "I'd cross the street. Stand next to somebody else. It was instinct. My picture was not to be in magazines. It was unsaid, I understood. It's something I spent 20 years doing a certain way – then I went completely the opposite. It's hard to figure out how that makes any sense. You find ways to rationalize it – like it's some character up there, it's not you."

The lure of the music and the road is easier for Jakob to explain: "I saw that stuff for so long, since I can remember. I just can't shake it out of myself. Just like some people who grew up on a farm . . . as you get older, you miss the farm." He is still figuring out how to reconcile the demands of the road with having his own family. His wife left college when their son was born; someday she'll want to go back. They come out with him sometimes, but he knows enough to be extremely protective of them. He will not even utter his son's name. Even though Jakob got through childhood without the phalanx of Glock-toting nannies and security consultants that cosset rock babies today, fallout from the rock & roll life whacked him hard as a child.

He wouldn't say so at first. He had told me that he barely remembered his parents being together before their divorce, in 1977, after 12 years of marriage. "It didn't seem that abnormal," he said. "I don't look back on that era and think, 'Boy, that's when my life went south, when my parents got divorced.' "

Remind him gently some time later that there is some rather unpleasant information out there, that it was all over the papers when Jakob was 7 and 8, and he says, "Of course." Anyone can find those facts. And he can understand the general curiosity, because some of the hell was hammered into Art, pressed into vinyl, and, baby, it sold.

In late 1974, as the marriage began to unravel, Bob Dylan made his "divorce album," *Blood on the Tracks*. Released in early 1975, it stands as one of Dylan's most brilliant records, a piece of majestic torment. Writer Greil Marcus described it as "the tale of an adventurer's war with a woman and with himself, and a shattering attempt to force memory, fantasy and the terrors of love and death to serve an artistic impulse."

It made great art, but there were five children caught in the emotional flood – one daughter and three sons the Dylans had together, and a daughter from Sara's earlier marriage. Mercifully, the court records were sealed, but for Jakob, there are other documents that echo those times. "If I hear [an upbeat song like] 'Tombstone Blues,' I'm having a good time with everybody else," Jakob says. "Those other songs on *Nashville Skyline* and *Blood on the Tracks* . . . those are my parents talking."

Nashville Skyline was cut in 1969, when his parents were making bread and babies – Jakob, to be precise – in Woodstock, N.Y. Jakob says he hears his parents in its love songs and in *Blood*'s accusations and laments. He is certain that although strangers danced and made love to them, those songs comprise a fathoms-deep repository of his family history. "Sometimes you just write songs for entertainment," he says. "Other times you get a feeling that it really matters. I can tell, in certain songs – maybe that's where I get my information on those subjects. But I've *never* had to ask *questions* about it. I've always kind of left it alone."

Come to think of it, Jakob has never asked his dad whether "Forever Young" was indeed inspired by Jakob's birth. He figures it was a rumor some Dylan freak cooked up, since clearly it's a song written to all well-loved children. And he can always listen to it fondly. Not so with, say, "Idiot Wind," from *Blood on the Tracks*, a song so rueful and vituperative that it's been compared to the poet Allen Ginsberg's epic "Howl." "Idiot Wind" deals with gossip, backstabbing, shattered faith.

"In a lot of ways, that's the only snapshot I have, because I don't have a great memory of that time," Jakob says. "A lot of random images might strike my memory hearing it. Those are my parents talking, and if I want to go to that place – I mean, how often do you want to depress *yourself*? Sometimes it goes in one ear and out the other. Sometimes, depending on my state, those songs can bother me."

It is doubtless to everyone's deep regret that some of the more vivid images of the Dylans' domestic travails became very public information. Some were contained in humilia tailed press releases issue Dylan's lawyer, Marvin "] Mitchelson, others in news erage of a harrowing incident at the children's school, in late 1977, as the custody battle raged. Though she had temporary custody, Sara Dylan, accompanied by private detectives, attempted to take her children out of class one day, chasing them through school and assaulting a teacher who demanded to see a court order. Sara was charged with battery for the assault, and subsequently was fined $125.

"That was my school," Jakob acknowledges. "I was there. I can honestly say that day is the most sensitive part of my life. I remember it more vividly than almost any other day. I've never really discussed it with anybody. If I talked about it, I'd probably end up with a therapist within a half-hour. It's that deep."

In fact, he says he's never opted for therapy. Asked just how he thinks he did get through it, he's silent for a moment. "The only thing I can come up with is that the kids were and are very close," he says. "And I didn't have to see very many bad things. I was in the back bedroom only being told the good things." And he was so very small: "I was too busy trying to get the cable TV to work or my toys to work."

In Southern California, smack in the middle of the Me decade, divorce was as common and noisy as cornflakes. Plenty of Jakob's friends griped loudly and justifiably, and still do. Not so the Dylan children. "In that sense, [my parents] didn't do a bad job," Jakob says, "because we *can* all function today without complaining about it."

There is a silence, and by now it's not hard to sense another of those difficult moments. "I'm kind of stuck here between saying I didn't see anything . . ." he says. "And the truth is, I *do* know quite a lot about it. But it's incredibly painful, and I don't feel it's any of my business. But I'd be lying if I said, 'Jeez, I really don't know.' "

It's information he'd rather not have, and he would never dream of asking his parents for more. Fortunately, things normalized after a harrowing custody dispute. The needs of the children prevailed. Bob Dylan explained it this way: "Marriage was a failure. Husband and wife was a failure, but father and mother wasn't a failure."

They just found an alternative parenting style. "We always had free access to both parents," Jakob says. "I spent half my time with both of them; there was never any time I couldn't be with whichever one I wanted. We were pretty much allowed to do what we needed and wanted to do. I traveled quite a bit. Certainly, going to Europe was more fun than going to school."

He says his that oldest sister, Maria, There are plenty of children, family get-togethers and, yes, doting, amiable grandparents. Both Bob and Sara watched Jakob marry Paige at his mother's Los Angeles home. Also present: Jakob's only surviving grandparent – his father's mother, Beatrice Zimmerman, whom Jakob adores.

"Jake's family is a huge advantage to him," says T-Bone Burnett. "I'm not talking about the name. I'm talking about the people. They're all great kids. Sara is a beautiful woman, and Bob . . . well, no matter what anybody thinks or writes, he is a wonderful man."

And, adds Jakob, a habitual seeker. When Bob Dylan, born Bob Zimmerman, temporarily turned his back on Judaism and declared himself a born-again Christian, there were interviews, concerts and albums (*Slow Train Coming*, *Saved*). "I went through different times," Jakob says of his spiritual upbringing. "During the conversion thing, I went where I was told. I was aware that it mattered to him. He's never done anything half-assed. If he does anything, he goes fully underwater."

By the time Jakob turned 13 – bar-mitzvah age – he says, "The wheel had turned. I've been Jewish for most of my life." He says that like those Little League games, his catered coming of age was well-attended. But it was hardly hip. "Stray Cats didn't play. It was like Larry's bar-mitzvah band."

Picture the composer of "Like a Rolling Stone" writing a check to some hard-swingin' nebbish in a blue velvet tux. How daunting it must have been to the guy picking out "Sunrise, Sunset" on the accordion to have Bob Dylan in the house. Jakob says he doesn't usually tell his own band beforehand when he knows that his father is coming to a Wallflowers gig. But he finds it pleasant, never intimidating, to know that Dad is sitting out there in the dark.

"My family might be labeled 'dysfunctional' like anybody else's family could be," Jakob says. "But nobody ever beat me. Being hurt, molested, those are real problems growing up. I didn't have any of that. I just had my family – whatever it was. I'm glad I can take care of myself and get around today and not dwell on any of that stuff. I think it's pitiful, a lot of people blaming their adult lives on their childhoods. You're an adult now; you have the ability to move on."

And so he has. He writes whenever he gets the chance, and if you want to plumb his lyrics for any clues, go ahead, have a ball. Yes, he concedes when asked about one song. "Ashes to Ashes" is an, ah, interesting one:

"Well, you could walk like a stranger, head back into here/Bringing gifts while you act so sincere/Bringing gifts for a boy